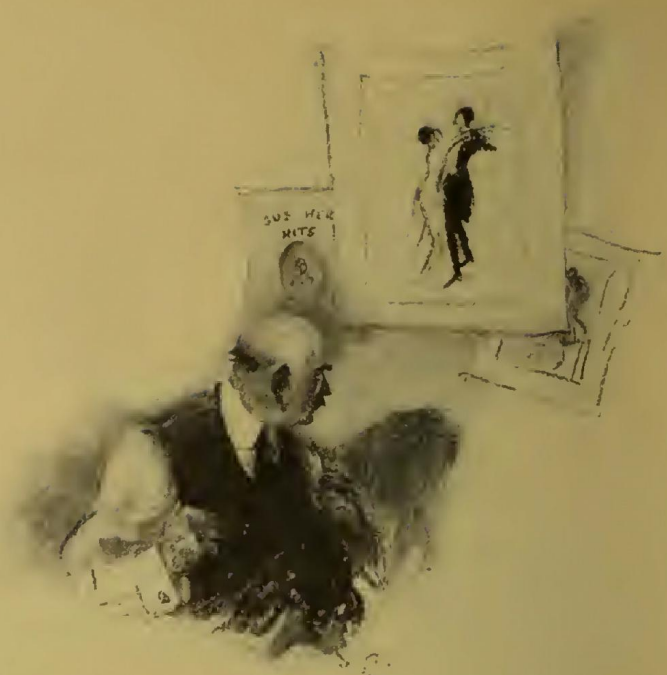


*A delightful romance of  
Tin Pan Alley—which  
may perhaps be considered  
the most important place  
in the country, for it is  
there that most of this  
nation's songs are written.*

By

WILLIAM C. LENGEL



# Rita and the Jazz Bo

*Illustrated by Grant T. Reynard*

ALL in all, the third of April was an eventful day in the fairly eventful life of Norman Stuart, known to his fellow students at Casaba University as "The Jazz Bo."

At midnight on April second he became twenty-one years of age; that was a circumstance beyond his control. With him, to celebrate the occasion, was Miss Rita York, prima donna soprano in "How Time Flies." At three A. M. the same morning Norman Stuart was married—another circumstance over which he did not really exercise jurisdiction. For who, given half a chance, could help marrying Rita York? At four o'clock that afternoon Norman was expelled from Casaba; that was for having led the Glee Club into an unauthorized nocturnal performance as a part of Weinberg's cabaret entertainment a few days previously.

When he left the office of Dean Barclay, it was plain to read in his easy, nonchalant bearing that expulsion from college meant nothing in his young life. Rita's company was giving a matinée performance which he judged would now be about over. The piece, having completed its successful New York run, was playing in Brooklyn, the first stop on its road tour. Norman took a surface car across Brooklyn Bridge, and by the time he arrived at the theater Rita was standing expectantly at the stage door.

They sought a quiet restaurant, and while awaiting service, Norman gave a burlesque of his final interview with Dean Barclay.

"I'm sorry you couldn't have stayed on at school for another year," Rita commented. "Graduation with a degree would have meant a great deal for you, and I imagine even more to your father."

"Why, I'd have quit anyway, if I hadn't been thrown out," he answered. "Haven't I got you to take care of now? What would you be doing?"

"The same thing I'm doing now," she answered.

"Well, I hope not," he returned. "You can give your two weeks' notice tonight. I guess I can look after you from now on."

"What are you going to do, dear?" asked Rita.

"I wrote Father that I had been fired from college, had married and settled down, and after a while I'd come out and run his shoe-factory," was the blithe reply. "A thing like that has its advantages—comfort, no worries, position, and all those things that count for stability and respectability in our Midwestern communities. Father will welcome us with open arms."

Norman erred. Saturday night after the performance he es-

corted Rita to the Grand Central Station to see her off for Buffalo, where the piece was to appear the next week. When he got back to his apartment, he found this letter from Stuart, Sr.

"My dear Norman:

"I can't say that your letter telling of your marriage was much of a surprise to me. That was the logical next step in your schemeless scheme of life. In view of your present marital state, your getting kicked out of the University doesn't call for any extended remarks on my part.

"So my daughter-in-law is one of the merry-merries! Well! Well! Son, you think I'm a narrow-minded old fogey. Perhaps I am; but please believe me when I say I have no prejudice against actresses as a class. Try as I may, however, I can't bring myself to find a great deal of respect for the kind you can take out and marry at three o'clock in the morning.

"You might as well make up your mind to paddle your own canoe from now on. I was willing to see you through all of your kid and schoolboy foolishness, but it's up to you now, son. I don't think there is room in the Stuart Shoe Company for you.

"Father."

Norman lay awake until nearly dawn. It was not now altogether a matter of supporting a wife; Rita could do that for herself. The real problem was to support himself. He did not rise until noon. Then, craving companionship, he decided to breakfast at Weinberg's, a roadhouse on the outskirts of the city. When he sat down at a table, Mr. Weinberg himself hurried over.

"I'm awfully sorry you got fired from college, honest, now, I am, Mr. Stuart," declared Mr. Weinberg.

"Cheer up," laughed Norman. "It doesn't make any difference. Give me some breakfast; I'm hungry."

Weinberg directed a waiter to take Norman's order, and then sat down at the table.

"Felix," the young man proposed, "what do you say to giving me a job in your cabaret?"

Mr. Weinberg was dumfounded. "Why, Mr. Stuart, honest now, you can't mean it?"

"Yes, I do," Norman insisted. "I've got to have a job. I can sing and dance, play the piano, act the clown, lead the jazz band. Give me a try at it, Felix. If I don't make good, you can fire me."



"Well, of course, Mr. Stuart, if you're serious—I've got to get some new talent, anyhow. It's not much money; only twenty-five dollars a week." Judged by the Glee Club performance, he knew that Norman could sing and dance after a fashion, and he was shrewd enough to realize that he would be a drawing-card among the students at the university.

"Felix, you've saved my life," declared Norman.

He spent the rest of the morning planning his "act." But he did not awaken a great deal of enthusiasm among the guests at dinner-time; this crowd was too intent on getting a full value from Mr. Weinberg's Sunday dollar table d' hôte. But later, when the hour drew close to midnight, the very lights of the place seemed to take on an enchanted glow, and a delicate odor of perfume mingled with the cigarette-smoke.

Norman sang, "Bill, the Bingo, Bango Mango Man," and they called him back again and again. Then he danced, and as his long arms and legs flew in a fashion to make him seem all arms and legs, they pelted him with dimes, quarters and half-dollars. He was altogether too excited to be embarrassed, too excited to notice even that the coins were falling all around him, until he heard commands from all sides to "pick it up, son." So still whirling and keeping in time with the jazz band, he caught up from the floor the pieces of change, and finally managed to bow himself off.

When Norman again reached the table at which Mr. Weinberg was sitting, he found a short, paternal-looking old man with a bald head, awaiting his return.

"Mr. Hertz wants to meet you, Mr. Stuart," announced Mr. Weinberg.

"Gus Hertz, the King of Tin Pan Alley?" gasped Norman.

"That's him," grinned Mr. Weinberg.

"Son," said Gus Hertz, grasping Norman's hand, "Felix tells

me this is your first professional appearance. There are few artists, even the great ones, who can do what I've just heard you do tonight. It's too bad Mr. Weinberg is going to lose such an entertainer just as he has discovered you."

"Lose me?" echoed Norman.

"Yes," said Mr. Hertz, "if you are willing to take a job from me."

GUS Hertz's "House of Song Hits" seemed to Norman, when he made his advent into Tin Pan Alley the next day, like a huge gingerbread music-box. The building in which were manufactured the popular melodies of the hour was a three-story, old-fashioned brownstone structure with a high stoop. All of the windows were open, and from them, blending in riotous disharmony, poured the collective striving of well-meaning vocalists, male and female, of all ranges and textures of voices, aided and abetted, even urged on or outdone, by iron-armed young men brutally mistreating a number of inoffensive pianos.

After a prolonged wait in an outer room, a boy finally directed Norman back to the butler's pantry which Gus Hertz had converted into a private office.

"Son," said the King of Tin Pan Alley, after closing the door to shut out the racket, "I've been looking for some one like you for a long time. The success of a popular song depends almost as much on how it is first put across to the public as it does on the song itself. It is not often that the composer can sing, and less often can he make a performer understand how to put a song over. You seem to have that knack. Your job will be song-plugging. After you know the ropes, I'd like to have you coach the other boys and the vaudeville people. I'll pay you fifty dollars a week to start; what do you say?"

"Fifty dollars!" gasped Norman.



"Until tonight," he said, "I never knew I was an old man." She shook her head. "You're not."



"Well," said Mr. Hertz, "I might make it fifty-five, with more a little later."

"Oh, that's all right," said Norman. He wondered if it would be well to tell the King of Tin Pan Alley of the music he had written, and after a moment's thinking, he decided it would be better to wait until he had written something new, and then show it. He wondered if his gift had deserted him, if it would come back again. He had not tried composition for nearly a year.

And now he had a job in a popular music-factory as a song-plugger. A song-plugger! Even the office-boy held an exalted position compared to his, in so far as dignity was concerned. He speculated on what Rita would think when she learned of it. He did not have quite the courage to tell her his exact status in his letter to her.

HER reply showed that she thought him a song-writing member of the staff. She would be back in New York in less than two weeks; they would rent a small apartment; she would again take up her vocal work with opera seriously in mind, while Norman would be gaining practice and experience for the Great American Opera he would inevitably write.

Her letter gave Norman pause, but events were moving too swiftly for him to worry. He did manage to take the time to hunt for a small apartment, however, and was lucky enough to find a family going for the summer at the seashore, and anxious to sublet.

It was just two weeks from the day of their marriage that he met Rita at the station, and surprised her by taking her directly to the apartment, where the cook, a heritage from the flitting family, had dinner awaiting them. There was a huge bunch of American beauty roses on the dining table, and the whole place breathed the spirit of home.

"Oh, Norman," cried Rita, "this is too lovely for anything! Now I feel like a really-truly bride."

He wondered how he was going to tell her the truth about his job in Gus Hertz's institute of jazz.

It came about sooner than expected. They were finishing their very leisurely dinner when Norman suddenly looked at his watch to discover it was past eight o'clock.

"Heavens!" he cried. "I had no idea it was so late. I've got to go downtown; there's a lot of night work connected with my job."

"You don't mean to say that you have to go away this evening?" said Rita.

"I'm awfully sorry, honey, but I do," confessed Norman.

"Well, can't you take me with you?" she asked.

It was the very thing he didn't want to do—just yet, anyway; so he said: "I should think it would be better for you to stay home and rest after your trip, dear."

"Oh, I'm not tired," she assured him. "I'm used to traveling and being comfortable doing it."

"Well, get your things on," he agreed. There was nothing else to do.

He was to sing at the Columbus Theater, a vaudeville-picture house that held "try-outs" of new acts on Thursday nights. He bought a ticket at the box-office for Rita, and told her to go in and sit down.

"I'm helping to put over one of the house's new songs," he explained. "I go on at nine o'clock and will be with you in fifteen or twenty minutes."

"You are going to sing in this place?" she asked, puzzled.

"Haven't time to explain just now," Norman said hurriedly. "Go on in now, like a good girl, and I'll tell you all about it later."

SHE sat through the unintelligible ending of a five-reel picture, and when that was ended, a drop-curtain showing a street-scene was lowered, and a boy hung up a sign, reading, "Norman and Rocket, the Jazz Boes." A piano banged, and Rita witnessed the edifying sight of her husband sliding out upon the stage accompanied by another of Hertz's song-pluggers, and entering into a rapid-fire patter of Tin Pan Alley masterpieces. They brought down the house, but the applause was far from pleasing to Rita's ear. She hurriedly left the stuffy auditorium, and when Norman met her, she was still tingling.

"How did it go?" he asked her in a spirit of feigned joviality.

"Splendidly," she said, but her manner belied her words.

"Let's go down to Hanley's and listen to a little cabaret," suggested Norman.

"Do you make an appearance there too?" she asked.

"No," he said. "I thought that might add a little cheer to the situation."

"I think I'd rather go home," she said.

She spoke hardly a word until they were in the apartment. Then

she said: "Just why doesn't your father want you in his shoe-factory?"

"What difference does it make?" demanded Norman. "He just doesn't, and I'm going along on my own hook. I'm in the music game; that's what you wanted, isn't it?"

"No, Norman, it isn't—at least not in the way you've gone about it. Let me see your father's letter."

Norman gave it to her and stood gazing sullenly out of the window into the dark while she read the epistle.

Rita exhaled a long breath. "That sort of simplifies matters," she said. "What did you write him in answer?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, Norman, you did nothing; you let things slide? That's just your trouble. You always take the easiest course. If you had had the courage of your convictions when you were really inspired to become a great composer, you would have gone to your father, and you could have made him see that *you* were the one to determine upon your future. He would have admired you, and in the end, helped you. Instead, because he looked down upon a musical career for you, you felt afraid to oppose him. Then, when you commit what he believes to be the worst of your indiscretions, marriage, again instead of going to him and having it out, you drift into the rag-tag of music. Way back in your head, you think your father is going to repent his hasty letter and take you into his business. You are still looking for the easy thing. Oh, Norman!" Exhausted and trembling, Rita burst into tears.

Norman gazed at her stolidly. "You seem to feel that you made a bad bargain when you took me," he said. "Why in the world did you ever marry such a good-for-nothing as you think I am?"

Rita went to him, placed her hands on his shoulders and smiled through her tears into his eyes. "Because, dear, I love you and want you above anything else in the world. And," she added slowly, "I was afraid if I didn't, some other foolish girl would."

RITA spent a very disturbed morning after Norman left the next day. She first busied herself setting the place to rights; then she tried to play and sing herself into a more cheerful mood. But cheer would not come. She decided to go for a walk, and as she was putting on her hat, the thought came to her to call on Gus Hertz.

She had heard a lot about the genial old King of Tin Pan Alley, who was reputed to have straightened out more marital difficulties than any court of domestic relations, had inspired more love-ballads than Venus herself, and who had brought about more romances than Bertha M. Clay ever dreamed of. Gus Hertz was the friend and father confessor of every actress and every singer who trod the uncertain path of Broadway. Hearing the troubles of others made him forget his own, he often said.

Rita sent in her professional card, and Mr. Hertz came from his den to welcome her to the House of Song Hits. "Ah," he said, "I have heard you sing; your voice is so sweet and sure it makes a straight path to heaven. I didn't know whether to weep or be happy when I read of your marriage. When was it? Last week?" As he rattled on, he was leading the way to his private office.

"Mr. Hertz, I think you're Irish in spite of your name," laughed Rita. "And I've been married two weeks. My husband is working for Mr. Gus Hertz."

"What!" he demanded.

"Yes, as a song-plugger."

"Ah-ha," mused Hertz. "So Norman Stuart is the husband of the famous Rita York. I thought there was something familiar about his name."

"I'm going to leave him, Mr. Hertz," Rita said suddenly.

"So soon?" queried Hertz. "He seems to be a nice boy."

"Oh, he's wonderful, Mr. Hertz. He hasn't shown you the music he has written. He began composing when he was a little fellow, and he has written all the last three shows at Casaba."

"Sure, I remember now," beamed Hertz. "I'll get after him right away. I want to see what he's done. But what's this about leaving him?"

"For his own sake," said Rita. "He is all broken up because his father has turned on him."

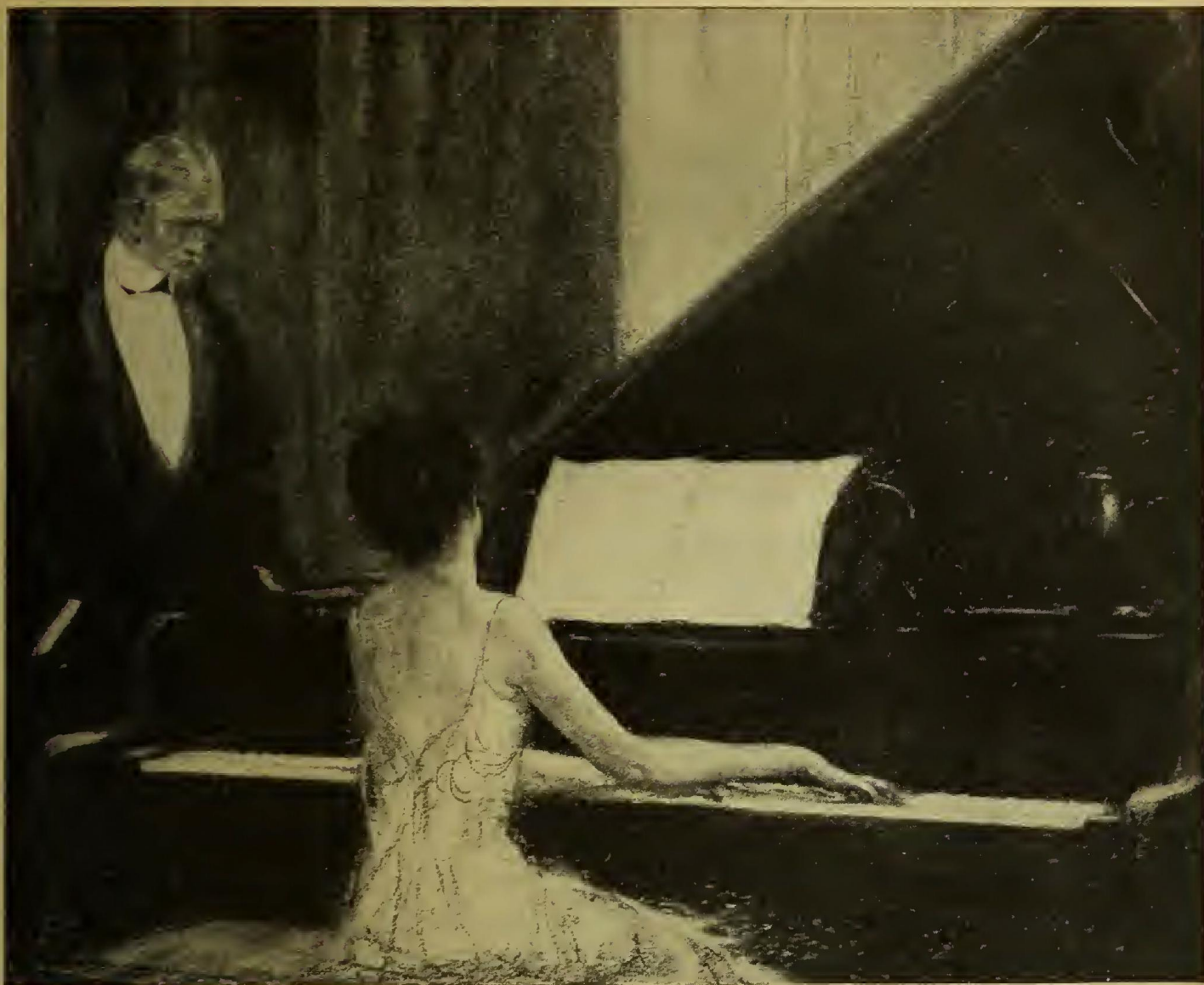
"Well, hasn't he got you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then he's got more than he deserves already," said Hertz. "I'll bet his father didn't want him to be a composer either, did he?"

"No," said Rita. "Norman had hoped to go to France to study while I went to Italy. Norman was full of grand hopes when we were in college together. That's when he wrote his best things. After I had to leave, he seemed to lose interest."





"It is the music I am counting on to interpret the story," Rita explained. She put her best skill into the performance.

"Yes, love will do that," said Hertz, "or lost hope. What good do you expect to do by leaving him?"

"Well, perhaps he can really find himself then, or patch things up with his father," said Rita.

"H'm!" said Hertz. "That might work, but why spoil your happiness and his too, when his father alone is the cause of all this trouble? I take it that he thinks you are no good because you are an actress."

"Yes," said Rita.

"Why not show him what sort of stuff you are made of?"

"How would you go about such a thing?" asked Rita.

"Get acquainted with him without letting him know who you are. That's easy enough. Where does he live?"

"Out in Westville."

"Simple," declared Hertz. "There's a stock company in that place—the Barrett Players. I'll give you a note to Mr. Paul Phillip Barrett, and you can join the company. You'll have to work out the rest of the problem yourself."

"Fine, fine," Rita agreed. "But what am I to tell Norman?"

"Leave Norman to me," said Hertz. "Before you know it, that boy will be writing some real music. I'll make him win you all over again, and his father at the same time."

Rita flung her arms around the good old King of Tin Pan Alley, and kissed him on one of his cheery cheeks.

Everything seemed so clear now, so simple, she thought as she left Mr. Hertz; but she had not proceeded far before her conscience began to trouble her. Was it anything more than caprice that prompted her to acquiesce in Mr. Hertz's plan? Was Norman's love strong enough to stand the test of such willful abandonment? Was his lack of aim in life due solely to his youth?

When Norman came in that evening his face was more serious than she had ever seen it. He took her gently in his arms and kissed her. He did not utter a word, but she knew that Gus Hertz had told him as much as he thought wise for him to know.

**P**LAYING one part, forgetting another, rehearsing a third, and reading over a fourth becomes second nature to the seasoned stock performer; but to Rita, established as "Mary Moffatt" with the Barrett Players, the task was trying.

Paul Phillip Barrett, the managing director, who played small parts, was an energetic, wide-awake, businesslike individual and raged at Rita for not permitting the use of her name, the advertising value of which would have been considerable. As it was, Mr. Barrett gave her appealing ingénue rôles; and in the time-worn but popular "Blue Jeans," she played the lead, as she did also in "The Professor's Love Story."

A means of approaching Stuart Senior presented itself quite unexpectedly. With Mr. Barrett and Mrs. Barrett, who played character parts, Rita motored out past the rather pretentious Stuart house on Grandview Boulevard. As Mr. Barrett pointed out the place to her, he said with mock grandiloquence: "Home of the Shoe Prince of the West, Mr. Franklyn Stuart, one of our most solid citizens—leader in all civic affairs. Nine months of the year he does not know me from Adam; the other three months he makes me believe I'm his pal."

Rita smiled.

"Every year this burg has a Fall Festival Week to draw visitors from the country towns around here, and book trade," Barrett ran on. "Fall festivals mean entertainment. Who's the Fall Guy in the Fall Festival? Paul Phillip Barrett. (Continued on page 118)"



## RITA AND THE JAZZ BO

(Continued from page 75)



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"Stuart is president of the Civic Association. And he's a worker—particularly when it comes to working some one else. Every spring he writes me a note inviting me to call at his office. He greets me like a long-lost brother. 'Well, Barrett,' he says, 'what sort of a show are we going to provide this October?' So I plan the show; he gets the publicity and the credit; the town does a rushing business, and I go to a sanitarium. I feel my hair turning gray now from trying to think up something novel for this October. When I went to see Stuart a few weeks ago, he had the nerve to say: 'Now, Barrett, I'm afraid the electric floats and the ballet are something of a chestnut. Get that wise old head of yours working on something new. Let's have a real novelty this year. Something new, huh?'"

"What have you planned?" asked Rita, blandly.

"Nothing," he answered gloomily. "That is, I've not been able to think of anything out of the ordinary. We've had ballets of nations, ballets of flowers, ballets of the ages, and all the other ballets. I suppose something will suggest itself, but so far I'm stumped."

"I shouldn't worry about it, Father, if I were you," said Mrs. Barrett.

"Why not a masque or pageant? I mean one written especially for the occasion," Rita suggested.

"H'm," said Mr. Barrett, "that sounds promising; who'd write it?"

"I would," answered Rita. "This town has a stirring history. I've been reading up. It would make a great show."

"Sounds good," asserted Barrett.

"It should satisfy Mr. Stuart too," continued Rita. "His grandfather was one of the founders of Westville, and when the place grew big enough, one of the names suggested was Port Stuart."

"Go to it, little one," beamed Barrett. "You'll take a ten-ton load off my mind. Draft a skeleton of your idea, and we'll go and talk it over with Mr. Stuart. Say, you'd have to have some special music, wouldn't you? Maybe we can get Rosey, who conducts our orchestra, to write it. He composes a little."

"I think perhaps I can take care of the music, too," smiled Rita.

SHE read everything she could find in the library and in the old newspaper-files about the early history of Westville, from when it was the smallest sort of trading post, up through the time a few shacks on the river-front gave it the dignity of a settlement, until now, when it had reached the point where it was called a "metropolis."

When her scenario was in shape, she took it to Mr. Barrett, and the next afternoon at three o'clock, the two of them entered the administration building of the Stuart Shoe Company. As they were shown into Mr. Stuart's private office, he was dismissing his secretary, and he turned to them with a welcoming smile.

"Mr. Barrett tells me that you have a plan for our Fall Festival that will sur-

pass anything we've done," he said to Rita.

"I'm sure I shouldn't say that," she protested. "Perhaps it may be sufficiently different to be interesting."

"Read to Mr. Stuart what you have written, Miss Moffatt," suggested Barrett.

Rita sketched her ideas for the pageant, and every minute or two Mr. Stuart, his face full of animation, interposed, "Excellent!" "Splendid!" "Very good, indeed. Very good."

It was nearly six o'clock when they finished, and Mr. Stuart offered to take them uptown in his car. On the way, he recalled that he had no dinner engagement and invited them to dine with him, but they pleaded the necessity of reaching the theater early for the evening performance. As he shook hands with Rita, in parting, he said: "I am quite familiar with the history of Westville, and I shall be happy to assist you in your work if I can be of any help at all."

Rita thanked him and smiled. At the performance that evening she described her father-in-law in the back of one of the boxes.

When Rita's scenario was sufficiently far along to give the composer a working-basis for the music, she sent it to Gus Hertz, and he in turn sent for Norman.

"Well, son," he said, "I've just got a report on that ballad of yours, 'When the Dear Old Days Are the Here Old Days,' and in two weeks' time it is on the way to smashing the sales-record of this place."

Norman flushed with pleasure. This was the second ballad he had written since Rita's departure, and it was hailed as the "hit of the year."

"But son, you're too big for that class of stuff. There is a gloomy-looking old building down on Broadway at Fortieth Street that is going to resound one of these days with the kind of great music you will write."

"Fortieth and Broadway?" said Norman, knitting his brow.

"I'm referring to the Metropolitan Opera House," said the King of Tin Pan Alley.

Norman laughed.

Hertz laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. "I'm in dead earnest. It's up to you, my boy. And right here's your chance to prove I'm right. Take this manuscript and look it over. Then tell me what you can do with it."

Norman glanced at the title, "Westville Ho!" "Why, why that's my home; my dad is the big gun of that town. Say, watch me."

And Gus Hertz had to write Rita that he was now having a more difficult time in stopping Norman from working too hard than he ever had had in getting him started.

WHEN Rita received the piano arrangement, she asked Barrett and Mr. Stuart to call at her apartment. Barrett read from the manuscript while she played the music, so that Mr. Stuart could



follow the development of the drama concurrently with the music theme.

"It is the music that I am counting on more than anything else to interpret the story," Rita explained. "The piano, of course, only gives a poor idea of the sweep and grandeur of the full orchestration."

She put her best skill into the performance. She felt, and was sure Mr. Stuart, too, must have felt the very spirit of the adventurous pioneers setting out for the Great West, the songs of the 'forty-niners, the monotonous creaking of the wheels of the wagons on the cross-country journey—the Indians! But through the musical narrative there was carried the *Leitmotif*—a stirring, exultant strain, the soul of a city, the sweet music of a triumphant industry, the whirl of machinery, the clang of street-car bells, the *rat-a-tat* of the pneumatic hammer, the thousand and one surging noises that go to make the mighty chorus of a city.

When she had finished and turned from the piano, Mr. Stuart arose and extended both his hands to her.

"It is wonderful," he said, "beautiful. That music almost talks. Its message is as clear as the story itself. It is sheer genius. Wonderful!"

Then for no reason at all Rita burst into tears, and still holding to his hands, rested her head on them and sobbed.

Then she raised her eyes. "Wasn't that too foolish for words? Oh, I'm so happy. You really do like it?" she choked.

"Yes, yes," insisted Mr. Stuart. "It reminds me of—of,"—he searched for the name of the composer,—"*of Wagner*," he ended.

"Oh, I think it is too American," said Rita, "though some of the sonorous, harmonious discords are a little like Wagner. I should say there is more of the influence of Debussy in it, particularly the descriptive passages."

This was beyond Mr. Stuart's depth. "Yes, yes, Debussy," he agreed. "I think you're right. It's wonderful. Yes, it's American."

After Barrett was well out of earshot, he took Rita's hand and pressed it warmly, gazing into her eyes with something more than friendly interest. "What a wonderful girl you are!" he said. "And you are as beautiful as you are wonderful."

Norman had come by his winning ways naturally enough, thought Rita, when her father-in-law had gone.

Mr. Stuart hurried after Barrett. "Exceptional young woman, very," he said.

"College girl," said Mr. Barrett. "Was in Barnard for three years; some family financial difficulties came about, and so she turned to the stage as being the medium best suited to her talents."

"So!" said Mr. Stuart.

"Yes, Mr. Stuart," declared Barrett, "the stage is not what it used to be, if it ever was anywhere near as bad as it has been painted. It is attracting really exceptional people these days."

"So it seems, so it seems," acknowledged Mr. Stuart.

The evening before the pageant's first performance, a dress rehearsal was held. The amateur actors forgot at once everything that had been drilled into them; Barrett stormed and swore, and more

than one factory girl who had been browbeaten by brutal autocratic foremen walked away from the scene in tears, vowing: "I've never been treated that way in my life."

MR. STUART, viewing the rehearsal, was in despair. Seeking Rita, he asked her to ride back to town in his machine. It was evident that there was something he wished to say, but the terrifying thought that the pageant would be a failure prevented him from expressing it. He did unburden his fears to Rita, but to make sure that she would not construe his remarks as reflecting on her, he said:

"It's really for you I'm worrying, little girl. It would be a tragedy if your work should go for nothing."

"I shouldn't worry, if I were you, Mr. Stuart," she smiled. "In the theater, when a final rehearsal goes as badly as this one, we always count on a good first performance, and even if everything else should fail, the music alone will save it."

"The music! Yes, yes," said Mr. Stuart. "It must take great genius to create music like that. Nothing has ever moved me so."

"The music is bigger than the pageant," said Rita. "It means more in many ways. It is the first big thing which that composer has done. Mr. Stuart, you are a patron of the arts. You believe, don't you, that a natural gift of music should be encouraged?"

"Most assuredly," he answered.

She rested her hand on his arm. "If this man were poor and struggling, carrying on his work against great odds, don't you think he should be encouraged—even assisted?"

Mr. Stuart looked into her eyes. How personal was her interest in this composer, he wondered. "Yes, indeed," he agreed. "I believe he should be encouraged. I shall see to it that the Festival Committee sets aside an adequate amount to compensate him for the music he has written for us."

Mr. Stuart begged her to have dinner with him, and promised that he would surely get her to the theater in time for the performance. They stopped at a little roadside inn, and had dinner served to them out on the lawn under the trees. Mr. Stuart fell into a morose mood, a strange and unnatural thing for him. Then he brightened up a bit. He reached across the table and captured one of Rita's hands.

"I'm going to ask you a question," he said, smiling. "You need not answer it, if you don't want to. But before I ask it, I want to give myself a sort of melancholy pleasure by telling you something. Do you want to hear it?"

Rita felt guilty, but she did not withdraw her hand. He was her father-in-law. "Yes," she whispered in answer to his question.

"Until tonight," he said, "I never knew I was an old man."

She shook her head. "You're not," she said finally.

"Thanks, dear," he smiled. "For the last few months I really thought I was young again, because—because I met you—"

Rita did not make a sound.

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"Are you angry?"

"No," she whispered.

They sat silent for some time. After a while he asked:

"Does this composer mean a great deal to you?"

"Yes," she said, "a very great deal."

He patted her hand, and sighed.

**B**ETWEEN fifty and sixty thousand people journeyed to Hope Park on the day of the Festival. The huge, natural amphitheater was a living mass before noon, and the surrounding hills were densely thronged.

In the valley was a level, grassy plateau, half encircled by a heavy growth of oak, maple and elm trees, affording at once a back-drop to the stage, and an exit for the performers. The river, coming from around the bend, was a silvery surprise in the sunlight.

The great orchestra of two hundred and fifty pieces was set to the right of the stage, the musicians themselves being hidden from the audience by a screening of foliage. At the back a huge sounding-shell had been built so that the music would not be wasted in perverse winds, and for the conductor a tall stand had been erected.

The Festival committeemen, their families and friends, the social élite of Westville, were gathered to view the pageant from a specially constructed grandstand, not too near, nor yet too far, from the stage. It was within a minute before two o'clock when Rita, accompanied by a short, fat man, arrived beneath the box she was to occupy with Mr. Stuart, and a party of his friends. She almost ran into Mr. Stuart, hurrying along from the other direction. He had just held his last conference with Mr. Barrett, and he was far from being a happy man. His face was marked with the strain of the great responsibility he felt to be his.

"Everything all right?" asked Rita.

"They are all ready to start, but the composer is not here. There was a special delegation at the train to meet him, but if he came in, he missed them, or they missed him. He's your composer; where is he?"

"He should be here by now," smiled Rita. "I want you to meet an old friend of mine from New York, Mr. Hertz."

The two men shook hands.

"The composer is Mr. Hertz's protégé," explained Rita.

"But he received his inspiration elsewhere," said Hertz.

They mounted the stairs leading to the box, and as they reached the topmost step, the leader of the orchestra was seen climbing to his stand. The crowd caught sight of him, and burst into a roar. It was a tall, lithe, smiling young man who very composedly turned to bow his acknowledgments before taking up his baton. For a moment he seemed to look straight into the eyes of Rita. Then he turned to the orchestra, raised his wand.

Rita, tingling to the roots of her hair, hardly realized that Mr. Stuart was gripping her arm, and struggling to speak. There were tears in her eyes as she turned to him.

"Norman," he whispered brokenly.

"Norman—my boy!"

"Norman—my husband," said Rita.

The pageant was on. A noble swell of melody swept from the orchestra in the valley, and flowed upward and over the hills, sounding a note of exultant triumph. It was music of transcendent beauty, but deep within its throbbing grandeur there lay a simple theme of simplicity and sweetness and faith and love.

"My son, my son!" Mr. Stuart kept repeating, bewildered. Then he gripped Rita's hand even closer in his.

"My daughter," he whispered.

## THE BLUE RIBBON

(Continued from  
page 43)

to win a little money for a *ranchita* with some mango trees." He went away, smiling happily, and leaving Señorita Romero contemplating the sugar-lumps.

Life moves swiftly at Mexicana. An hour later Dolores was whispering her sweet hopes to Madam Double-chin, and neither was aware that Brayfield's young gamekeeper had just killed a man, and was imprisoned in the *cuartel*. Truly, the dice are well named "the devil's teeth."

**N**INE times the house had lost, and there was twenty-two hundred dollars on the table. The law of averages was yielding to the reckless play of Pancho Gonzales, gunman from the Tres Pinos country. Back of an imperturbable mask, the mind of Johnny Powell analyzed swiftly the last nine throws, and recalled that Gonzales had first rolled the dice clear down the table, and they had been tossed back to him by a fat man with beady eyes, chewing nervously upon a black cigar.

"Just a minute, *amigo*," said Johnny Powell. "I feel a little superstitious. Try

your luck with these bones, and I'll relieve you of the others."

He reached into the case, and tossed out another pair of dice.

"*Por Dios, no!*" flared the man from Tres Pinos. "I keep the dice by which I ween! You think I cheat?"

Thirty men, packed around the long table, held their breath.

"I told you I was just superstitious," reminded Johnny. "The house has the right to change the dice at any time. Use that pair, or pick up your money."

Pancho Gonzales hesitated. Then, quick as the dart of a snake's head, he drew and fired. The shot went wild; and he did not live to get in another. There was a flash of blue from the other side of the table, a spurt of red—and the man from Tres Pinos went down, clutching vainly at the table. No one else stirred or spoke.

"All right," sighed Johnny Powell. "Pick up your money, boys, and get out. Don't you move, Morwych—I've got you covered. Everybody else, beat it!"

In a few minutes Brayfield's was cleared of its usual patrons. There remained only Johnny Powell and his fellow gamekeepers, the prostrate figure on the floor, and Mike Morwych.

Johnny walked up to the proprietor of the Palace, tore open the latter's coat, and reaching one hand into the left vest pocket, withdrew a pair of dice with the Brayfield house-mark. They were apparently identical with the ivory cubes that Pancho Gonzales had been using, but there was this difference: The dice on the table had the usual markings—the trey on the right and the four on the left when the ace was uppermost and the

deuce in front; but on the dice taken from Morwych's pocket, this order was reversed, and by that token Johnny knew his own dice. Cold blue eyes looked at Morwych.

"Don't you ever come in here again," warned Johnny. "Don't even walk on the same side of the street—understand? I should have seen it when you picked up my dice and threw yours to your partner, but I was thinking of something else. I shot in self-defense; but you, you yellow dog, you're getting away with a cold-blooded murder! Get out now before I drill you."

Morwych left without saying a word. A few minutes later, red-trousered soldiers showed up from the *cuartel*, and Johnny Powell surrendered. He had no misgivings. A Mexican's life counts for little on the border if the man who takes it is employed by Brayfield; and even though his employer was away, Johnny knew how things were managed. He slept peacefully on a couch in the *comandante's* office.

**E**ARLY in the morning Señorita Romero hurried to the *cuartel*. She was trembling so violently that when the prisoner appeared, she would have fallen if he had not caught her.

"There, there, sister," he comforted. "Why, what's the matter, honey? You're not worrying about me!"

"*Si, si*," she quavered. "Canst thou not understand? I have loved all along, and now thou art in danger. *Ay, Dios!*"

Johnny Powell waved one hand at the gold-braided bailiff, and that individual discreetly withdrew, thereby missing the sight of Brayfield's young gamekeeper bending his head to meet upturned lips.

### "The Owl"

He wanted to become an eagle,  
but owl he was destined to be.  
And then one day came his great  
chance. On such a theme Mc-  
Creedy Huston has written a  
great story for an early issue.